Interoperability in Virginia

CICO Corner
By Chris Essid

We are pleased to bring you the first edition of the Commonwealth Interoperability Newsletter! The newsletter provides quarterly information concerning the Commonwealth's plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability.

The Kaine administration has relocated the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator's Office (CICO) from the Secretary of Public Safety's Office to the Office of Commonwealth Preparedness. The CICO also moved physical locations to 202 N. Ninth Street, 9th floor, Richmond, VA 23218.

We look forward to hearing from you and having every stakeholder involved in this process. To date we have made great strides to improve interoperable communications in the Commonwealth and by continuing to work together we can do even better!

Chris Essid

Chris Essid
Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator

Recent Events: SIEC Meets with Governor Warner

At the monthly State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) meeting on Wednesday, January 11 the SIEC met with special guests Governor Mark Warner and Secretary of Public Safety, John Marshall. Governor Warner commended member service to the Commonwealth and commented on the need for interoperability to be seamless throughout the state with all first responders. As a former businessman familiar with the high-tech industry, he encouraged the SIEC to keep an open mind about technology and encouraged them to keep Governor Kaine up-to-date on the effort.

The Governor asked the group what the next hurdle is for public safety communications. Captain Eddie Reyes, SIEC Chairman, said that public safety is resistant to change because radios are heavily relied upon and change would affect the comfort level of operations. The SIEC is working on spreading the word to overcome these barriers because tech-

nology will improve operations and make jobs easier. Support from the Governor's Office, state agencies and the SIEC is allowing localities to overcome hurdles and lead the locally driven effort from the ground up. (*continued on page 5)*

Practitioner Spotlight:
Captain Eddie Reyes

Captain Reyes of the Alexandria, Virginia Police Department currently serves as the Arlandria Area Commander in Alexandria. He was previously assigned to the CommTech Program (formerly the AGILE Program), a program of the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. For the past three years, Captain Reyes managed and provided oversight to public safety radio interoperability operations for the City of Alexandria and is a key player in the National Capital Region. With over 15 years experience in law enforcement, he has achieved expert status in domestic violence (DV) investigation, 800 MHz trunked radio systems, E-911 telephone systems and CAD.

At the state level, Capt. Reyes chairs the Virginia State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC). Nationally, Capt. Reyes sits on the Law Enforcement Information Management (LEIM) Section of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the US Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM Advisory Working Group.

Each Newsletter will feature a Public Safety Practitioner that has had an impact on Virginia Interoperability. We interviewed Captain Reyes and this is what he had to say:

In your opinion, what is the biggest interoperability challenge in Virginia?
Without a doubt, the biggest interoperability challenges in Virginia are standards and training. Interoperability issues started when public safety agencies purchased their communications equipment. With no real standards in place to guide purchasing, Virginia ended up with multiple, disparate radio systems. Beyond purchasing, the way we train users from agency to agency also varies. Currently, there is little focus on standardizing radio protocols in the Commonwealth. If we hope to respond more effectively to major emergencies we must standardize across agencies to ensure that we can be responsive and effective in mutual aide scenarios.

Standardization is a challenge because it touches on engrained cultures and traditions that are not easily changed. Virginia's public safety agencies must change in this post-9/11 environment; we can no longer sit back and be comfortable with not being able to talk to one another. I am involved with the development of common language protocols for day-to-day operations, as well as major emergencies. Common language for day-to-day operations is extremely important if we are to be successful in mutual aide situations as, under stress, most practitioners will revert back to their training.

Training is also a big challenge for the Commonwealth. Unfortunately most public safety agencies provide very little radio or communications training to their personnel outside of the academy. Practitioners are provided with very basic communication skills at the academy that are never revisited. As a police officer, I train with my firearm at least twice a year and I may never need to use it; I use my radio every day and I received training once in my entire career. The only thing that stays constant with communications and interoperability is it is always changing and that is why training over time is so important.

What prepared you for your position as SIEC Chair?
Five years ago I was just your average public safety practitioner – I used my radio just like everybody else: push and talk. When I got promoted to Lieutenant I was put in charge of the Alexandria 911 center and I had to learn fast to make the change from the street to this highly technical environment.

I learned how important communications issues are and appreciated all the technical aspects that make up a fully functional public safety agency.

Pushing Progress: PMO Update

PMO Launch
In November 2005, the CICO stood up its Program Management Office (PMO). The purpose of the PMO is to provide technical and strategic support to the CICO and the effort as a whole. The CICO PMO support team will be staffed by UNISYS (contract lead) and the SRA-Touchstone Consulting Group.

Homeland Security Grants Program
This year marks the first Homeland Security grant cycle in which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has used the National Preparedness Goal to shape National Priorities and focus expenditures. The CICO was tasked with leading the interoperability grant submission efforts and utilized a two-staged process to capture the information necessary for this investment: 1) A statewide interoperability needs survey and; 2) A two day stakeholder meeting.

Virginia's public safety interoperability effort focuses on a practitioner driven approach. Keeping to this commitment, the CICO developed and distributed an interoperability needs survey to stakeholders across the Commonwealth through the existing state interoperability governance structure. The survey gathered general stakeholder needs and was used to represent the needs of those that would not be in attendance at the stakeholders meeting.

The Virginia 2006 Homeland Security Grant Stakeholders Meeting was held in Richmond on January 17-18, 2006. The meeting's purpose was to align Virginia's homeland security programs with the National Preparedness Goal and develop the investments and initiatives that will be included in the Commonwealth's grant submission. The interoperable communications subgroup was led by a professional facilitator whom guided stakeholders through a collaborative consensus driven process. The attendees at the two-day stakeholders meeting included members of the State Interoperability Executive Committee, executive representatives of Virginia's public safety associations, and organizations with a vested interest in Virginia's interoperable communications. (c*ontinued on page 5)*

Upcoming Events

- *May 7-10, 2006*—APCO Regional Conference will be held in Virginia Beach. For more information please refer to the Chapter's website www.virginia-apco.org

- *May 12, 2006*—2006 Command, Control, and Communications Vehicle Rally will be held from 0700hrs-1400 at the Fairfax County Police Driver Training Facility (3725 Stonecroft Blvd, Chantilly). The purpose of this event is to bring together the communications vehicles and personnel that operate them to share information and experiences with each other. To RSVP and for more information Please contact James Wadsworth, Manager, Fairfax County Radio Services Center (703) 324-3635 James.Wadsworth@FairfaxCounty.GOV

- *October 3-4, 2006*—the 3rd Annual Statewide Interoperable Communications Conference will be held at the Renaissance Hotel in Portsmouth. On line registration and more details about the conference will be available on the interoperability website www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov within the next few weeks.

In Your Own Words:
Public Safety Radios –
Know This Tool Better!

Computer Based Training Concept
Paper
By Bob Moseley

The purpose of this paper is to outline my concept of a computer based training (CBT) module designed to aid first responders in the use of their radios. Working with a variety of first responders during major events it has become evident that many first responders lack the ability to effectively use their radios beyond the most basic push-to-talk functions. When working an interoperability event, first responders are often called upon to use their radios in unfamiliar ways. Many have not known how to change zones or to go to direct mode.

With all the different models of radios in use in public safety it will be impossible to develop a specific training manual for each model. Additionally, the buttons on the radios are programmable and their function will vary from agency to agency even though the radios themselves may be exact. However, it should be possible to create a CBT that explains all the features and capabilities of this valuable tool. This knowledge is critical for the effective use of their radios.

After giving some thought to the contents of the CBT module I conclude that there really needs to be two training modules. One would describe the functionality of the radios. All of the features of the radio would be described and demonstrated. The purpose of each feature would also be explained. In addition to the physical characteristics of their radios there should be brief discussion of the public safety frequency bands and the various communication systems such as conventional and trunking.

The second CBT module should address the issues of interoperability or multi-agency response. Working with other agencies brings on additional challenges for the radio system(s) and especially for the users of those systems. Components of this module would include an explanation of the National Interoperability Channels (NPSPAC), the need for standard radio language and other such issues. It should briefly discuss communications switches and linking channels.

The CBT modules should be held to a fifteen to twenty minute length so that they can be reviewed during roll calls or in-service training. In addition to the CBT module, the media should also provide access to more in-depth information. Various publications, links to web sites and other resources could be included.

The goals of the CBT should be to increase the comfort zone of the student in the use of their communications tools and to make them aware of the issues of interoperable communications.

A combination of actual demonstrations of various features as well as animated drawings will be necessary to effectively describe most of the features. The training should be consistent with NIMS and other publications.

Bob Moseley has been a consultant for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) since 1999 working on the CommTech project. In this capacity he works with public safety agencies across the county to foster interoperability in both computer and land mobile radio networks. He has served as a member of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) in Washington, D.C. from 1970 to 1990. In the twenty years with MPD he served in patrol, the Civil Disturbance Unit (CDU), as a Crime Scene Search technician, as a computer specialist, project team leader and finally as commander of the Microcomputer Section.

Federal Report: Homeland Security Grants Program

"From the Oklahoma City bombing, to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, to last year's hurricanes, we've seen time and again the critical need for systems that enable officials responding to a disaster to communicate quickly and effectively," said Tracy A. Henke, Executive Director of the DHS Preparedness Directorate's Office of Grants and Training (G&T).

"For that reason, interoperable communications is one of the priority capabilities set by our National Preparedness Goal. Last year, and again in FY2006, G&T targeted grant funds to help meet these national priorities. To receive Homeland Security Grant Program funds, major urban areas must develop and submit to G&T by May 2006 a Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan for how they will work to establish integrated, regional communications systems.

"I appreciate and commend the efforts of the Commonwealth of Virginia in working to meet these goals, to strengthen your interoperable communications capabilities, and, in doing so, to help build our nation's ability to prevent, prepare for, and respond to terrorism and other disasters."

(Pushing Progress continued from page 3)

Executive Order for NIMS
On November 1, 2005 Governor Warner signed Executive Order 102 requiring the adoption of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and use of the National Preparedness Goal for preventing, responding to and recovering from crisis events in the Commonwealth. NIMS has been adopted nationally and is being implemented in Virginia as the federally required incident management system. To achieve this goal, the Executive Order places the State Coordinator of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management responsible for NIMS implementation.

An important point of the Executive Order is its requirement that "all emergency plans and procedures shall be developed in consonance with NIMS, the National Response Plan and in accordance with the National Preparedness Goals." The CICO addresses this requirement though Initiative 3 of the 2006 Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability: "As defined by NIMS, identify and adopt common language protocols in the Commonwealth for day to day operations and major emergency situations." For detailed information on NIMS or for an on-line training course please visit the NIMS website at: www.fema.gov/nims.

(Recent Events continued from page 1)

In response to the Governor's inquiry about the next milestones, Fire Chief Charles Werner, Charlottesville, said building relationships with regional efforts, working with the Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS), and leveraging funding from the Federal government to enhance the effort are the next milestones. Changes in technology, spectrum efficiency, and changing mindsets are critical. Captain Reyes discussed getting disparate systems to work together during a crisis situation.

Lieutenant Joe Ribeiro, Norfolk Police Department, explained that the SIEC is in the process of implementing the Strategic Plan which puts the Commonwealth on track to address many of the communications interoperability issues.

Finally, Secretary of Public Safety John W. Marshall presented SIEC members with Governor's Certificates of Recognition and expressed his gratitude for the tireless commitment.

(Captain Eddie Reyes continued from page 2)

As the commander of a communication center for two years I developed a deep sense of respect for the communications field. The primary PSAP is run by the police department and the secondary PSAP is run by the fire department. I found that the redundancy was good, but was also bad because there was disconnect among the personnel and communications between the PSAPs was typically done by telephone.

After five years of work on communications issues I started attending the meetings of the State Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC). I found a lot of value in the practitioner driven model that the state was using to improve interoperable communications. I worked in many interoperability circles throughout my region and was excited about an opportunity to start implementing new opportunities for training and standards throughout the Commonwealth. When Chief Charles Werner stepped down as the SIEC chair this year I knew I would like to share my vision and experiences to further improve interoperable communications on the state level.

What prepared you for your job?
My mother gave me a very strict upbringing with a respect for others and the law. This provided the cornerstone for my ultimate decision to become a police officer. Helping and respecting others are the foundation of what I stand for and has always been a big part of my life. I was always the guy that would pull over to help someone with car trouble!

Becoming a police officer was a perfect fit. I stayed out of trouble as a kid because I always knew that one day I wanted to be a member of the law enforcement community.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned from your job?

I have learned so many lessons! One major lesson is that no matter how easy or logical you think a task may be the best of intentions can get derailed by the agendas of others. No matter how good your intentions or ideas are there will always be obstacles in a political and government environment. This has taught me to plan better, to think about obstacles and prepare for them.

If you weren't doing what you are doing, what would you want to do?
I would be a general contractor. It's a little known secret that I am somewhat of a Bob Villa. I have every tool known to mankind. When I retire from police work I will likely become a general contractor to build homes, buildings, or do remodeling work. I get such a great satisfaction out of seeing the finished product and seeing the faces of those I have helped when the job is done.

Former SIEC Chairman Fire Chief Charles Warner, Charlottesville, had this to say about Captain Reyes, "Eddie has been immersed in the world of interoperable communications and he is a natural choice to lead the SIEC. Leadership and personal relationships are key to VA's success - Eddie has both. Lead on my friend."

(Pushing the Progress continued from page 5)

IAT Updates

Much of the progress towards the Strategic Plan is done at the Initiative Action Team (IAT) level. The IATs align with the initiatives in the Plan and are comprised of EC members, Advisory Group members and other subject matter experts. The mission of the IATs is to develop work products, make recommendations to the SIEC and implement the initiatives from the Strategic Plan. The IATs were officially kicked off in early December 2005. The active IATs and tasks to date are listed below. For more information on the IAT efforts or to participate on one as a subject matter expert, please contact Chris Essid at chris.essid@governor.virginia.gov.

IAT #3: As defined by NIMS, identify and adopt common language protocols in the Commonwealth for day to day operations and major emergency situations. To date, IAT #3 has:

- Investigated and stayed current on the status of the overall common language effort including NIMS
- Begun conducting outreach to obtain endorsement throughout the localities
- Investigated efforts of other localities regarding common language protocols

IAT #4: To develop and promote technical standards and operational protocols. To date, IAT#4 has:

- Produced a revised roadmap and operational matrix to guide IAT 4
- Produced a detailed matrix demonstrating how Virginia and IAT 4 can leverage NIMS and the STARS Project
- Obtained a detailed P25 training manual and continue to gather information on P25 issues in relation to IAT 4

IAT#5: Develop recommendations to Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA) on what interoperable communications equip-

ment and services need to be included in state contracts. IAT #5 will be kicked-off this quarter.

IAT#6: Promote the use of local, regional, state and federal mutual aid channels to foster interoperable communications. To date, IAT#6 has

- Developed and finalized a mutual aid channel baseline template draft
- Confirmed data collection approach
- Completed draft outline of mutual aid utilization and tracking guideline

IAT#7: Coordinate and assist localities and regions with the 800 MHz rebanding process mandated by the FCC. To date, IAT #7 has:

- Familiarized practitioners with the services the Sprint Nextel is offering through the state.
- Familiarized and engaged practitioners with rebanding efforts in major metropolitan areas
- Established timeframe for 800 MHz Rebanding Workshops for major metropolitan areas

IAT#8: Develop the statewide 700 MHz plan and assist with implementation. To date, the IAT is assisting the current efforts underway by VITA. This IAT will be used as a resource for VITA.